

KSP Telecommunicators: More Than Just A Voice continued

"I knew I was ready to help the subject because I had spoken to him so many times over the years," she says. "For him to be personally asking for me in this most critical hour of need showed that a strong form of trust had been achieved and I was not going to let him or my troopers down."

While she waited, Thomas was thinking about what she would say to the subject. "I wanted him to know that I was there for him just like he had asked and that I was his friend," she remembers. "I wanted him to know that I was going to help him. I was also very worried about the troopers on the scene. I wanted to make sure that I did not say anything to make the subject more upset. I made up my mind that I just needed for him to talk, just as he had done in all the other phone calls in the past. I mostly just needed to listen and let him know I was there for him, and I was going to help him just as I had in the past."

Thomas felt at a disadvantage however. "The hardest part was doing this from my home," she explains. "I was not in my comfort zone. I could not hear the troopers or have constant contact with them. Not being at work put me at a disadvantage, and I was concerned about making a mistake that could get a trooper or the subject hurt."

Finally, the phone rang and the dispatcher on duty told Thomas she was patching her through to a trooper's cell phone. She heard the trooper tell the subject, "We have Dispatcher Thomas on the phone, and she is going to talk to you on speaker phone."

"I first asked the subject if he could hear me," Thomas recalls. "When he heard my voice, he began to sob and cry out my name over and over. He said he was so scared and wanted to be placed into protective custody. He said he was so glad to talk to me, and he knew everything was going to be all right now."

She then heard one of the troopers on the scene say, "Dispatcher Thomas wants me to place you in protective custody now."

Shortly thereafter, Thomas called Post 2 and was told that after talking to her, the subject had surrendered his weapons, exited the apartment and was taken into custody without further incident. Both the subject and all the troopers involved were fine.

"They told me it was a good thing that I was able to talk the subject out because troopers on the scene had reported they were getting nowhere talking to him and his actions and mental state would most likely have caused them to use extreme force with possibly fatal results," she notes.

Thomas has still never met the subject she helped that night. Yet she believes her phone contact with him over the years made the difference. "I never at any time made any promises to him, and I never lied to him, even if the truth was not what he really wanted to hear," she points out. "He just needed someone to listen. I believe that is the reason he called KSP and asked for me personally."

Thomas has been a telecommunicator for KSP for 15 years. Prior to that, she worked as a dispatcher for the Dawson Springs City Police for three and one-half years. She credits these years of experience with aiding her actions that night.

"I have spoken to callers in the past who have talked about ending their lives or wanting to hurt others," she says. "Each call is completely different and you learn something from each call you take. These lessons you learn just help you prepare for the next call."

"I learned mostly that you do affect the people you speak to and help even if you never think anything you do or say matters," she adds. "There will be someone out there who will remember who you are for what you did or did not do for them."

"The best part of the job," she concludes, "is knowing that I have helped someone in some way, and that everyone on my shift went home safe. It's a great job for someone who wants to help others and does not need acknowledgement for it. The reward is knowing you made a difference."